Myrtle Creek Commercial Thinning and Density Management
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

South River Field Office
EA# OR-105-05-09

Date Prepared: July 26, 2007

Finding of No Significant Impact

The South River Field Office, Roseburg District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), has completed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Myrtle Creek Commercial Thinning and Density Management project. Two alternatives are analyzed in detail, consisting of the Proposed Action, Alternative One, and No Action, Alternative Two. Two additional alternatives that were considered but not analyzed in detail are also described (EA, pp. 11-13).

Units selected for treatment were identified through field reconnaissance and stand examinations. The units are located in: Sections17, 21, 26, 28, 33, 34, 35 and 36, T. 28 S., R. 3 W.; Sections 9, 11 and 21, T. 29 S. R. 3 W.; and Sections 1 and 3, T. 29 S., R. 4 W., W.M. A description of the "Proposed Action" is located in Chapter Two of the EA (pp. 5-10).

Unaffected Resources

As addressed in the EA (p. 13), the following Critical Elements of the Human Environment will not be affected because they are absent from the project area: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); prime or unique farmlands; floodplains; wilderness; waste, solid or hazardous; and Wild and Scenic Rivers. No unique characteristics would be impacted (Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations - 40 CFR § 508.27(b) (3)).

Environmental Justice

The Myrtle Creek Commercial Thinning and Density Management proposal is consistent with Executive Order 12898 which addresses Environmental Justice in minority and low-income populations. As discussed in the EA (p. 13), no potential impacts to low-income or minority populations have been identified by the BLM internally or through the public involvement process. Employment associated with the project would be performed by local contractors engaged in similar types of work throughout Douglas County.

Correspondence with local tribal governments did not identify any unique or special resources in the project area which provide religious, employment, subsistence or recreation opportunities.

Cultural and Historical Resources

As described in the EA (p. 30), five cultural sites have been previously identified in proximity to the thinning units. Two of the sites are outside of thinning units and will not be affected.

One site was determined not "significant"[1] as defined in the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations, while another was deemed significant. Unit 28-3-26A was reconfigured to avoid landforms containing sites, resulting in a "No Effect" determination for the sites associated with Unit 28-3-26A. Two sites were located within Unit 28-3-35A which has been reconfigured to avoid harvest on the sites. Reconstruction and use of the existing White Rock jeep trail for timber haul has the potential to affect one of the sites. This will be mitigated by placing geo-textile cloth on the existing, unaltered road and covering it with at least 12 inches of culturally sterile fill. These two measures will result in a "No Effect" determination for the two sites in Unit 28-3-35A. As a consequence, there will be no adverse impacts to scientific, cultural, or historical resources (40 CFR § 1508.27(b) (8)).

Wildlife

A meta-analysis of available demographic data for the **northern spotted owl** was conducted in 2004 by Anthony et al. combining population data from 14 study areas located throughout the range of the spotted owl. In 1999, Lint et al. found that owl populations were declining range-wide, particularly in the State of Washington. This information was synthesized with existing literature in *Scientific Evaluation of the Status of the Northern Spotted Owl* in 2004 by Courtney et al. Causes of population decline could not be identified with certainty, but researchers feel that a combination of previous habitat loss, recent loss of habitat to wildfire, predation on spotted owls, weather, prey abundance, and competition from barred owls is responsible. Researchers also noted that the importance of each of these agents likely varies by region.

Spotted owl populations in the Klamath Mountains physiographic province were shown to be stable or declining very slightly. This finding is consistent with the prediction of the Northwest Forest Plan that populations would slowly decline and eventually reach equilibrium with available habitat. Courtney et al. stated that: "the fact of such a decline is not in and of itself unexpected or reason to doubt the effectiveness of the core NWFP strategy."

As stated in the EA (p. 17), none of the units are located within critical habitat units designated for the survival and recovery of the northern spotted owl.

As noted in the EA (p. 41), Unit 28-3-26A is overlapped by the Curtin Creek and Johnson Creek home ranges. Density management will downgrade the function of the stand from suitable habitat to dispersal-only habitat, however, it is expected that both home ranges would continue to support spotted owls because the amount of suitable habitat remaining within them will still be well above the minimum levels considered the threshold for supporting spotted owl nesting and reproduction. Thinning of the remaining units will modify dispersal-only habitat. The thinning is not considered likely to have an adverse effect on owls, however. It is expected that owls will continue to use the stands because canopy cover will remain above 40 percent with mean tree diameters greater than 11 inches, figures widely accepted as a threshold for dispersal function.

1 Significance refers to the value of the resource as defined in the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations, rather than effects as described in the National Environmental Policy Act and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality.

No effect to spotted owls from noise disruption is expected, as thinning operations will either occur outside of the disruption threshold for known spotted owl sites or activity centers, or be seasonally restricted from March 1st to June 30th if within the disruption threshold of unsurveyed suitable spotted owl habitat. This will ensure that noise disruption will not cause spotted owls to abandon nests or fledge prematurely. Seasonal restrictions could be waived until March 1st of the following year if surveys indicate spotted owls are not present, not nesting, or failed in nesting.

In a letter of concurrences dated June 24, 2005, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that because treatments will not occur within 0.25 mile of any known spotted owl nest site or unsurveyed suitable habitat during the nesting season (March 1 – September 30), there would be adequate dispersal habitat available to the spotted owl, and potentially disturbing activities will not occur within prescribed distances of any known spotted owl nest site or unsurveyed suitable habitat during the critical breeding season (March 1 – June 30), commercial thinning projects are not likely to adversely affect the spotted owl.

As described in the EA (p. 19), habitat for the **Oregon shoulderband snail** (*Helminthoglypta hertlieni*) and **Chace sideband snail**, both Bureau Sensitive species, is present throughout the project area. Surveys of suitable habitat have been conducted and no shoulderband snails were located. Two occupied sideband snail sites were identified, one in Unit 28-3-21A and the other in Unit 29-3-11A. Unit boundaries were altered to exclude the sites from the units and provide for their persistence.

The **northern goshawk** (*Accipiter gentilis*) is a large forest-dwelling hawk found throughout temperate forested regions of the northern hemisphere. As discussed in the EA (p. 19), nesting goshawks have been previously located in Section 17, T. 28 S., T. 3 W. in proximity to Units 28-3-17 B, C and D. Surveys of the nest stand over the past five years have not detected the presence of any goshawks, and as a consequence the site is considered abandoned. Therefore, no effects to goshawks are anticipated and no seasonal restrictions for goshawks will be required.

The **peregrine falcon** (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) is a Bureau Sensitive raptor once designated as a Federally-threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. As described in the EA (p. 19), there is a known aerie within a mile of Unit 28-3-35A. Thinning will not modify nesting or foraging habitat. To avoid disturbance during nesting and fledging, seasonal restrictions described in the EA (p. 10), will prohibit operations January 1st and August 15th, but may be waived earlier if no young are present, or once the young have fledged.

Purple martins (*Progne subis*), **Townsend's big-eared bats** (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), **Pacific pallid bats** (*Antrozous pallidus pacificus*), and **fringed myotis bat**s (*Myotis thysanodes*) might be expected to use forests stands in the project for roosting. As discussed in the EA (pp. 43-44), while some limited amount of nesting or roosting habitat for these species could be lost to thinning operations, the action will indirectly benefit them by accelerating development of late-successional forest conditions.

Botany

Surveys for all Special Status botanical species suspected in the project area were completed in the summer of 2006. No Special Status vascular plants, lichen or bryophytes were located in any of the thinning units.

No known sites of Bureau Sensitive fungi species will be affected by the project because of the spatial distances from thinning units documented in the EA (p. 22). While it is acknowledged that thinning and density management could result in the loss of unknown sites, it is not be expected that this would lead to a need to list any of these under the Endangered Species Act because, as discussed in the EA (p. 48), suitable fungi habitat is expected to remain abundant and well-distributed across the Myrtle creek fifth-field watershed.

Fisheries

There are no listed fish species in the project area or on the entire Roseburg District but, as described in the EA (p. 26), Essential Fish Habitat is present within two miles of all proposed units and in two instances adjacent to proposed units. The only potential effect identified is with respect to sediment, but with implementation of the project design features and best management practices described in the EA (pp. 48-51) the risk for sediment and adverse effects to Essential Fish Habitat is considered to be negligible.

For the reasons described above, there will be no significant adverse impacts to any special status species (40 CFR § 1508.27 (b) (9)). The anticipated impacts would be within the range and scope of those analyzed in the *Roseburg District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (PRMP/EIS).

The project conforms to all applicable Federal, State, and local laws (40 CFR § 1508.27(b) (10)).

Of the ten points listed under 40 CFR § 1508.27(b), the following were considered and were found not to apply to the proposed action: significant beneficial or adverse effects; significant effects on public health or safety; effects on the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial; anticipated cumulatively significant impacts; highly uncertain or unknown risks; and no precedents for future actions with significant effects.

Based on the analysis of potential impacts contained in the environmental assessment, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and that an environmental impact statement is not required. I have determined that the proposed action is in within the scope of impacts anticipated in the PRMP/EIS, and is in conformance with the *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (ROD/RMP) for the Roseburg District, approved by the Oregon/Washington State Director on June 2, 1995.

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Date